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"LE MISANTHROPE"

A Thesis

Submitted to the Faculty of the

Academic Department

of the .

UNIVERSITY OF LOUISVILLE

through

PROF. G. L. SPILLMAN

In Candidacy for the Degree

"MASTER OF ARTS"

by

HENRY WILLIAM LENZ

1912

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## PREFACE.

## P R E F A C E.

The aim of this thesis is to show that there is found in this "noblest of comic masterpieces" an absorbing study of mankind and a profound knowledge of the human heart. It is in his work that man gives himself to the world; in his literary efforts he gives a vivid portrayal of himself, his r e a l and i n - n e r self is splendidly revealed, though the merely material man is kept in the background.

Bearing this in mind the writer has endeavored not so much to depict the character of Moliere, but, rather by an analytical process, to designate the elements which constitute in a grand "ensemble" human nature the world over.

The works of Moliere have always fascinated me, none other however, has so thoroughly impressed me as the most original of all the masterpieces of this great author. May then this brief study be considered an honest endeavor to give expression to the appreciation of Moliere's dramatic power in "Le Misanthrope", and the esteem in which this great poet is held by the writer.

# **I N T R O D U C T I O N .**

## INTRODUCTION.

### Molière and his times.

The life and work of every great man can not be fully understood apart from the times in which he lived. Whether he be a man of public affairs, author, artist, philosopher, philanthropist or reformer, his life must be studied and his work must be judged from the plane of the times in which he lived. The fact that sometimes men have lived ahead of their times even cannot alter this statement, for their times may have been conducive to such strides, may have been indicative of greater periods, and may have contained a prediction which found expression in the life and work of such men. The life of Molière is particularly interesting, and from whatever standpoint we may endeavor to view it, it will never cease to be fascinating. Molière was born in 1622 in the very heart of Paris, and received christian baptism January, the fifteenth, in the church of St. Eustache. His early life is shrouded in obscurity. The boy's life was saddened by the loss of his mother when ten years old. The father's business was not to the liking of the boy, and home

perhaps not so attractive since a step-mother was present.

He was attracted by the travelling troupes of mountebanks who played to the surging crowds on the Pont-Neuf, the main artery of Paris. Here, and in the playhouse, Hôtel de Bourgogne, where he accompanied his grandfather very often, he acquired the first taste for comedy. Having attended the Jesuit College of Clermont, where he evidently became familiar with the classic drama, and studied philosophy under Gassendi. He took the first steps to carry out his plan to become an actor in 1643. From 1643-1658 he roamed the provinces, a wandering actor, serving the somewhat severe apprenticeship to his profession. The last fifteen years of his life 1658-1673, give us the proof of professional success and literary glory found in Paris. We can obtain much information from these periods, still there are many gaps which imagination only can fill out.

In endeavoring to bring Molière into proper relation with the times in which he lived, one should really know more about his own private



life, than can actually be obtained.

To understand the literature of the 17th. Century, in general, and the works of Molière in particular, one must bear in mind the peculiar characteristics of so superb a monarchy as is established under Louis XIV.

Politically it meant the rise of French power and supremacy in Europe. The history of that period is so far-reaching that even in a study like this it cannot be entirely ignored. Wars, successfully waged by France, brought not only military renown, but also wealth. The political power of France became more and more evident when Richilieu, the ablest statesman of the time, directed the affairs of state at home and abroad. Conducting the foreign policy he caused conditions which rapidly were bringing about the almost total ruin of Germany's social, religious and political life.

Richilieu shrewdly managed to incite the German Protestants to resist the Catholic imperial power, while at home he repressed, with a strong hand, the aspirations of the Huguenots. At his

death a worthy successor was found in Mazarin who skillfully completed the work of Richilieu. Louis XIV. found the way for further political successes fully prepared when he became old enough to assume the reins of government. The realization of absolute Kingship, as he desired it, was made possible, and a reign of concentrated splendor, such as the world had not beheld since the days of Augustus, was inaugurated in France. Victorious wars resulted in strengthening the position of the King. Taxes were readily paid while the country became prosperous by the spoils of war. The splendor of the reign of Louis XIV. was heightened by the King's requirement that all his nobles must spend, at least, a part of the year at his court.

Court-life became magnificent by the tendency which led men of talent and adventure to Paris. This period of the political history of France will never cease to claim our interest; but of far greater attractiveness is its social and literary history. During this time modern polite society was being consti-

tuted and conversation raised to the level of an art.

Though the form of the literature of this period may be classical, it nevertheless shows a free and independent manner, and warrants to us an exact reflection of the national spirit. Louis XIV. having settled the political and religious quarrels, which had come down from his father's reign, resulted in an almost total absence of political and religious discussions, and a magnifying of the person of the King. It was indeed a very fruitful period so far as elevation of manners, customs of society, literary and intellectual activity is concerned. Mankind was made an absorbing study, the human heart the object of profound knowledge. This tendency of the age will forever preserve its universal interest in the omnivous and varied literature of Pascal La Bruyère, and La Rochefoucauld.

In the literature of the period we find great artificiality, instinct however with the spirit of the times. French classical tragedy, expressing the grandiose reign of Louis XIV, chose as its channel sonorous verse and lofty

sentiments, reflecting the galantry of the age in languishing Greek and Roman heroes. The characters speak the artificial language of the day. Still while these limitations of French classical tragedy apply equally to the comedy of the 17th. Century, we do not note the same injurious effects. Comedy is a freer form and is of more universal interest than tragedy, because of its dealing with ordinary mortals; whereas tragedy deals with Kings and heroes. French comedy is the regular development of elements as old as French literature itself. To raise the mediaeval farce to the dignity of comedy and to free it from the influences of Italy required a long series of efforts. The one great writer of comedy, such as we find nowhere else, is Molière. His fame excels that of Racine and Corneille. His life however, as well as his works, is pre-eminently the cause of such fame.

PART I.

LITERARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS  
OF MOLIÈRE'S COMEDIES.

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PART I.

LITERARY AND CRITICAL COMMENTS  
OF MOLIÈRE'S COMEDIES.

Early in the 17th. Century tragedy held the stage in France, but with the coming and rising of Molière a change took place which has had its lasting influence upon dramatic art. The comedy which Molière produced is justly called "true comedy" and was destined to crowd out and consider such farces as were written by Gros Guillum and Gautier-Garguille as things of the past. Complications of plots in such plays as "Les Visionnaires", by Desmarte, and "Le Monteur" by Corneille were almost incomprehensible. Likewise Scarron's attempts in farcical comedy abounded in mystification, and buffonery. But at last the genius had come who, by picturing true life in its enticing freshness and naturalness, swept away such clumsy and superficial efforts. Life that had almost been stifled by affectation in speech and artificiality of manner, was once more set free, and glowing pictures of life presented in the master-

V

fully applied adornment of Molière's wit and practical philosophy a captivating charm. Molière not only pointed out the way but also supplied the means by which society might be corrected and improved. Only a genius like Molière could become the creator of modern comedy; liberating himself from long established rules he rose to heights never before nor ever since attained. "Of all Frenchmen, Molière remains the author who enjoys universal homage, whose place in the world's literature is above all other contrivers of comedy, ancient and modern."

Breaking away from the Italians and Spanish he successfully busied himself with the customs of his time and squarely attacked the affections and absurd pretensions of the vulgar imitators of the Hôtel de Rambouillet. With his "Précieuses Ridicules" he achieved a signal victory. The verdict given by an old man witnessing the performance of this play - "Courage, Molière, that is true comedy!" - has generally been accepted as fully correct. This spurred Molière to greater efforts. "Henceforth" he said, "I shall study Plautus and Terence, and reveal the fragments

of Meander." By thorough assimilation he masterfully impressed with his own originality what he borrowed from the classics. He himself said "Je prends mon bien où je le trouve". And he did! Truly in such a masterful manner that amid provoked laughter, like flashes of lightning, shine forth the "secrets of the nethermost abyss" of human nature. In no other play of his than in "Le Misanthrope" does Molière deal with human attributes of all times, and of all races. This play is a profound study of human nature, not only a dealing with the manners of men of his time and his race. The substance supplied in this dramatic creation of Molière is human nature itself. "Le Misanthrope" sets it forth so vividly that the power is lasting. If of Dante it could be said "there goes the man that has been in hell" Molière might well inspire one to say, "here is the man that has seen the human heart."

Molière in the "Misanthrope" more than in any other of his comedies, makes a most pointed, as well as touching, protest against the social customs of his time. The insincerity of social



relations, the superficiality of matters pertaining to love; against cynicism and the conventional falsity of living.

A mind so filled with abhorrence concerning the faults and vices, a heart so full of bitter pains inflicted by such falseness in the life of men could not otherwise but produce a play in which the sincere and upright man might give vent to his feelings.

A person may be subject to criticism because he publicly expresses his private griefs, or sets before the people the torments of his public warfare. The history of mankind however, reveals the fact that the finest products of man's mind owe their genesis to a secret source of pain or some bitter disappointments; they are the fruit of the vital energies spent in the effort to express righteous indignation against the wiles of men. To Molière seeing was believing, perceiving he sought for a proof, having found it he chastises the r i d i c u l e u s elements which by men of his time were esteemed s e r - i o u s l y. Vices and wiles, whims and trivial-

ities, falseness and folly, insincerity and inconstancy, and conventional lying - their incarnations he affected in his many comedies, particularly in "Le Misanthrope". Forever they must be considered the noble work of a mind that has put upon them the impress of imperishable verity. They are not simply to be considered the makeshifts of a phantastic mind, but must always be recognized as an effort successfully carrying out the portrayal of individuals, in whom the age of Molière finds its own leanings and vices.

In Molière's drama there are two points which cannot escape our notice, and which belong to him and him only. His accurate observation of human life, and the happy expressions in which he clothes his thoughts, make it possible for him to "imbue farce and burlesque with the true spirit of refined comedy." Unfriendly critics have pronounced his manner of doing so as exaggerated, but what they failed to bring out, was a statement of their own deficiency of perception. "Even the most roaring farces" one biographer writes, "demand rank as legitimate comedy, owing to his un-

matched faculty of intimating a general purpose under the cloak of the merely ludicrous incidents which are made to surround the fortunes of a particular person." The next important point to be observed in his plays is that the general purpose is invariably a moral one. Evidently Molière must have constantly been guided by the theory that the stage is a so-called lay-pulpit; his plays were not simply to be considered to be merely amusing, but rather instructive and had for its ultimate purpose the reforming of manners by means of amusing spectacles. And if at times, pushing his purpose perhaps a little too vigorously, he has missed the mark, should we not withhold unkind criticism which usually has for its basis a lack of appreciation for the most essential elements in Molière's works ? His creative faculty was extraordinary. Of poetic beauty we can hardly discover much, for the almost total absence of which his too positive nature, his habit of too literally describing society may be held responsible. But what he may lack in this respect, he makes up for in brilliancy of wit, in which he is inferior only to Aristophanes

and Congreve.

If we restrict the definition of comedy to the dramatic presentment of the characters and incidents of actual life in such a manner as at once to hold the mirror up to nature, and to convey lessons to morality and conduct, we must allow Molière the rank of the greatest comic writer of all the world. "Castigat ridendo mores" is a matter which no one challenges with such a certainty of victory as he." Molière certainly is to be considered a genius in the endeavor to give to us comedy pure and simple. When we read his comedies, when we see them performed, we are not at once taken by the amusing and mirthful, the portrayals of characters appeal to the heart and the head. The ability of satirising men's follies and bad qualities, as well as their silly manners, and by depicting cleverly their good sides, we are struck by the moral which like ' a golden apple is presented to us on a silver plate.' We have said that in the opinion of Molière the stage was held to be somewhat of a lay-pulpit, which however does not imply that the comic dramatist

must necessarily be considered a preacher to the audience. What Molière however does teach is that the office of comedy preeminently is "to show how men and women act and re-act upon one another in the play of life, and proclaim themselves to be what they are by their speech, by their deeds." He skillfully and clearly sets forth wrong-doing, in such a spirit however, that induces people to laugh at their own weaknesses. By employing fair satire he cleverly exposes vices and foibles, exhibiting both their harm and folly. If he does not succeed to gain his point by causing the laughter of everyone, he may perhaps, by creating disgust and dislike, in some effect, attain his object nevertheless. "When Molière had a strong moral purpose in view he made true comedy the vehicle for teaching his lesson, and he showed his purpose with great comic force."

Ready to chastise, he knew how to use the whip; with what force and to what extent can be seen in all of his comedies. The selfishness of fathers or guardians, the frivolity and heartlessness of woman, the hypocrisy and dishonesty of peo-

ple of rank and profession - all feel the stinging, smarting cord of the whip. Even if punishment does not always correct, in the intended caricature and its ridicule, people were made mindful of their obnoxious character at least. Whether we would think of him as a stern taskmaster, who wishes to offer his moral as a precept to mankind, or whether we consider him disposed to pleasant railleries, treating us to the fun of good satire and irony, does not matter much; we are brought face to face with the fact that he produces a picture of what he sees and hears, a vivid statement of the results produced by foolish and bad actions in the life and manners of men. Though we may get the impression that Molière must have been ill-natured (at certain times at least) we cannot help to concede that he always was governed more or less by charitable intentions. Thus we might close this chapter with the conviction that Molière knew quite well how to hold and use the rod, and while we would not elevate him to the position of a preacher of righteousness or assign him to an office of spiritual instructor, we should not degrade him by considering him as an overzealous policeman.

**PART II.**

**LITERARY ANALOGIES.**

**SHAKESPEAR'S "TIMON OF ATHENS"**

**GOETHE'S "FORQUATO TASSO"**

## PART II.

### LITERARY ANALOGIES.

Analogy is the general resemblance that one thing bears to another. Shakespeare's "Timon of Athens" and Goethe's "Tasso" bear such analogies to Molière's "Le Misanthrope."

"Timon of Athens" is a domestic tragedy, and its resemblance to "Le Misanthrope" is found in the subject rather than in the contents. Both authors have expended their strength upon the analysis of emotion, and the creation of character rather than the plot. Some of the resemblances in these plays are strikingly significant.

Timon of Athens is a wealthy and extravagantly generous lord, hence has many friends. Upon these he lavishly bestows gifts for their assiduous flattery. His sensible steward is much concerned about the reckless waste and foresees speedy impoverishment. His creditors also become uneasy and by pressing their claims, bankruptcy proceedings are instituted.

Timon's friends prove false, ungrateful, and unworthy. At a final banquet, given by Timon



his friends are driven from the house. Having thus rid himself of his friends he abjures the society of all mankind and lives in a cave of the forest. Digging for roots upon which he subsists, he finds a treasure which revives painful recollections of his folly of former days. Part of the treasure is bestowed upon Alcibiades, a former friend of Timon. There is but one man in whom Timon places faith - his steward, who sought him out in his solitude and remained true to him even in adversity. Remembered with a liberal gift he is dismissed by Timon with the injunction never to come again within his sight.

Alcibiades, planning to bring humiliation upon the false friends of Timon, attacks Athens. In their distress the Athenian senators visit Timon, implore his aid, and promise restoration of fortune and honor. With taunts and curses Timon receives and dismisses them.

The city falls, and while punishment is inflicted upon its inhabitants, Alcibiades and Timon's enemies receive the news of Timon's death.

This ends the drama; and its analogy to Moliere's "Le Misanthrope" is brought out in the principle character of the play. Both, Timon and Alceste, are hostile toward humanity, the former becomes so d u r i n g the play, while the latter i s so from the beginning.

Both characters are disgusted with so-called friendship, and give vent to their feelings in vindictive utterances. Timon's hatred is awakened by the same experience as Alceste's; friendship that only lasts under favorable circumstances, but ceases in the reverses of life. The unselfishness of both apparently becomes tragic in a selfish world. Yet this a p p a r e n t u n s e l f i s h n e s s is seen at bottom to be s e l f i s h. Timon turns misanthrope because of loss of control of material circumstances, Alceste because he fails to save out of the mass of humanity the object of his love, Célimène, whom he desires to become his partner in his solitude somewhere in a desert place. Failing to do so he becomes irreconcilable.

What analogy bears "Torquato Tasso" to "Le Misanthrope" ?

Tasso, an Italian poet presents to Alphonso, Duke of Ferrara his epic entitled "Gerusalemme liberata" which he has just recently composed. The Princess, the duke's sister, rewards him for this effort by placing a laurel wreath upon his brow. Antonio, a courtier and statesman, envies Tasso his distinction, and a heated conversation which takes place between them results in a quarrel in which Tasso the poet unsheaths his sword. The duke surprises them in their quarrel, and seeing the unsheathed sword inquires the meaning of all. Tasso and Antonio both defend their course of action. The rashness of Tasso is punished by being banished to his room.

This act of Alphonso causes Tasso to believe that impartial friendship cannot be enjoyed by men. His trust in the friendship of the duke, is shaken. He mistrusts Antonio, who wishes to apologize for his actions. Likewise does he refuse the proffered services of Leonora, the friend of the Princess, to establish reconciliation between him and Antonio.

When the period of his incarceration is over he contemplates to depart from the court of the duke.

He loses control of his passions and confesses his love for the princess. For his rash actions, in making known his passion of love, he is thought to be insane, and repulsed by the princess. In the consequent conversation taking place between him, Antonio, and Alphonso, he considers himself forsaken by all of his former friends. But in Antonio he now really finds an unlooked-for support, and considers him the rock of safety who at first appeared to him the very means of shipwreck.

In Tasso we have a man, who like Alceste, turns misanthrope because of experienced disappointment in love, preceded by the imaginary loss of friendship of persons who are still friends.

Every recognition of his literary ability causes Tasso to think very highly of his friends, for whose sake he even makes the effort to be on friendly terms with Antonio, against whom he shows a certain apathy.

If he realizes all he anticipates he is the most satisfied person, but when someone ventures to cross his path, or attempts to thwart his ambition, he believes himself deceived, betrayed, and for-

saken.

The three characters resemble each other in the attitude they take against former friends. Having lost faith in them they seek comfort in shunning association with their fellow-men.

With this all similarity ends however. In Alceste we meet a character already adhering to a certain fixed principle that constitutes for him the standard by which the friendship of men must be judged. It is the refusal of such principles by his friends which causes him to doubt the sincerity of any one of them. His evident honesty and sincerity in dealing with men finally isolate him from the society of man.

Timon's case is different. He makes savage onslaughts on society because he has been shamefully abandoned by his pseudo-friends; he has no principle to surrender, but simply ceases to be popular when he becomes poor. Wealth has brought friends and flattery, poverty isolates him.

Tasso's ambition to win friends by his literary gifts accomplishes many things he yearns

for. His talents are recognized, and bring him honor and esteem. As long as no foreign element creeps into the friendship established on his personal merits, all is well. But the slightest criticism seems to unhorse him in the fray out of which he endeavors to save for him the love of a woman who could not understand him. L i t e r a r y a c - c o m p l i s h m e n t s had brought him to a lofty place which he voluntarily surrenders for a slight criticism exercised by a friend. Severe rejection of his passionate love by the woman who adorned his brow with laurel wreath brings about his isolation.

Each one of these men have failed in their estimate of friendship practiced by their friends.

Alceste is not without a Philinto, who is of different opinion than Alceste, but proves to be a friend to the very last.

Timon is not forsaken by everybody. There is an Alcibiades, and better still, a steward. A steward could hardly have aspired to become a personal friend of his master, but when riches fail, this steward proves a truer friend in poverty than

ever Timon could have expected.

Tasso, who clings to friends who know how to estimate him, is reticent to form new bonds of friendship with a man who envies him his success. And yet, it is on Antonio, considered by Tasso the wrecker of his happiness, who proves to be the very means to prevent a human life from becoming a heap of ruins.

Friendship still conquers. It still survives in the hearts of intimate friends; in such of lower stations in life than ourselves; and even comes to life in the hearts of men who may have been, or seem to be, our very opponents.

### **PART III.**

#### **THE ANALYSIS.**

- 1. General Outline.**
- 2. Principal Characters.**
- 3. "Le Misanthrope", Alceste.**



PART III.  
THE ANALYSIS.

1. General outline.

The "Misanthrope" is a comedy in five acts, written in verse. It was brought out in June 1666, a production of the matured fulness of Molière's poetic powers. This masterpiece of the poet does not appeal to the plain playgoers as some of his other comedies which are far less distinguished from the standpoint of literary finish. Brander Matthews remarks by way of comparison, "The 'Misanthrope' lacks the powerful structure of 'Tartuffe' and the variety of incident of 'Don Juan'. Its qualities are literary rather than theatric, philosophic and psychologic rather than dramaturgic ... And in the composition of the 'Misanthrope' Molière for once forgot the lesson which he learned from the Italians and which he had kept in his mind while he was building the solid foundation of 'Tartuffe.'"

In the effort to bring out prominently the figure of Alceste, Molière seemingly neglects

the invention of a story, plot, fable or intrigue "strong enough to serve as a supporting frame for it." In its superbness it rather lacks the intensity of movement. Alceste is there, is always there. The different incidents are apparently devised to create a succession of opportunities in which Alceste can successfully display his contempt for, and hostility against social hypocrisies.

The play presents, in noble outline and satisfactory details, a picture of the time of Molière. The characters are men and women of fashion, moving in the highest circles of society, some even claiming acquaintance with the King.

The scene is laid in the drawing-room of Célimène, a young and beautiful widow. Among her many admirers is one to whom she is strangely inclined, Alceste. His attitude toward Célimène's admirers is anything but friendly, and he violently expresses his abhorrence for the society in which she moves.

An almost sordid exaggeration in speech

and action characterizes Alceste in his meeting with Philinte his friend, who admits that society is guilty of many things mentioned by Alceste, but disapproves of the manner in which he expresses his opinion. Plain-spoken, and sincere almost to absurdity, Alceste resents the flatteries of Oronte, a courtier, whose newly written sonnet he declares to be worthless. This discourtesy arouses the anger of Oronte and drives him in peevish fury from the house.

In the second act Alceste remonstrates with Célimène against her matter of fact acceptance of attention from the other admirers. Two of these, Clitandre and Acaste, in company of Philinte and Éliante, the latter Célimène's cousin, are presently announced. A very effective scene follows. Celimene skillfully leads in a conversation in which she displays her keen sense of satire by sketching portraits of her acquaintance in the fashion of the time. Alceste listening, manifests his indignation by stinging expressions from time to time. The sudden call for Alceste to appear before "a tribunal having

jurisdiction in disputes between gentlemen," instigated by the offended Oronte, closes the second act.

In the third act Arsinoé, a mature prude is introduced. She intends to thwart Alceste's passion by accusing Célimène of flir<sup>17</sup>tation. Substantiating her accusation by a letter, she intimates her willingness to console Alceste herself in case he should break with Célimène. Such a critical condition closes the third act.

The fourth act opens with a conversation that takes place between Éliante and Philinte, with Alceste for its subject. Éliante not only shares in the high regard which Philinte has for Alceste, but even intimates of being able to have tenderer feelings for him. This does not disturb the peace of Philinte; he only desires the opportunity to make certain of her love, in case Alceste should marry Célimène.

Alceste returns terribly wrought up on account of one of Célimène's letters given to him by Arsinoé as proof for her perfidious coquetry. Célimène withstands the rash accusations and severe re-

proaches, and with her calmness she disarms Alceste. Were it not possible that this letter had been written to a woman ? Suspicion and jealousy is overruled in Alceste by the ardor of his passion, and once more he becomes the urgent suitor. The fourth act closes by Alceste's departure to attend to some important lawsuit.

The information, given to Philinte by Alceste that the lawsuit is lost, opens the final act. Alceste is indignant about matters of justice as practised by corrupt judges. He refuses to take an appeal, and rather prefers to be crushed by the iniquity of procedure. In the presence of Oronte, whom he surprised in paying court to Célimène, " demands that she decide, once for all, whose affection she prefers." But she flatly refuses to do so, inviting Éliante to decide the merits of the case, when suddenly Clitandre and Acaste appear, each bearing a letter that shows how satirically Célimène ridiculed her admirers, e v e n Alceste. Overwhelmed by such evidence Célimène

expresses her contrition to Alceste. Forgiveness is granted and conditioned upon the willingness of Célimène to go with Alceste to an abode in the desert to escape "the pestilent insincerity of the fashionable world." To this proposal she does not respond, consistently so; "humbled but undismayed" she lays her snare for some other victim. Crest-fallen Alceste rushes away seeking the coveted solitude to which the spectacle of human meanness is unknown. As he goes Philinte requests Éliante to aid him "in thwarting the scheme his friend's heart has proposed."

## 2. The Principal Characters.

Every character of importance in the "Mis-anthrope" is a representative of the "best society" of the time. The rather thin veneer covering customs and manners of that courtly era does not hide entirely the coarser fibre of the real make-up of its representatives. A finished and polished politeness is prominently evident, not less however, the vulgarity of the moral and ethical life of the best society. Underneath the thin folds of society forms and manners, the real men and women, almost devoid of common decency, can be discerned. Upon the fundamental vulgarity of feeling, thought, and action of polite society of his time, Molière proceeds to create his characters. These step forth in naturalness, both in artificiality and reality; pretences and facts stand side by side, co-workers together for the ultimate result.

The hero is Alceste, the heroine is Célimène. Then there is Philinte, Alceste's friend; Éliante, Célimène's cousin; Arsinoé, a woman-gossip; Oronte, an amateur poet; Acaste

and Clitandre, two court dandies. Célimène, the object of Alceste's love and devotion, proves rather unworthy of so much sincere affection. Young and beautiful, frivolous and vain, almost reckless in accepting the admiration of men, she appears to possess every characteristic of a "flirt". Harroumet judges that Célimène, though a woman but twenty years old, had the experience of a woman of forty. He describes her as "coquettish and feline with Alceste, frivolous and backbiting with the little marquesses, cruelly ironical with Arsinoé . . . . . She is the exquisite and rare product of an aristocratic civilization in the full splendor of its development, and often she speaks a language of almost plebeian candor and freshness."

Philinte is a man of even temper, a tactful man of the world, possesses ability to discern the wrong, but in a charitable way, refrains from judging it harshly. He recognizes the baseness of the world, admits the lack of virtue, but is sane enough, not to attempt to rectify the faults of society, and liberally advocates the theory that one must bow to the customs of the



time. Estimating vice he rather appears to be liberal in his judgment; as a virtue-loving man he is sane in not quarreling with anyone in the interest of the one or the other.

Éliante is a worthy woman little tainted by the evil of her time. Womanly virtues are not lacking, though perhaps a weakness is detected in her willingness to abandon one lover if her affection were desired by another.

Arsinoé is a prude, revelling in mischief-making. Though her charms have lost their attractions, she displays vanity enough to make a daring attempt to win the passions and admiration of Alceste. With the adornment of well chosen words she shrewdly conceals the bluntness of her speech. Her intriguing ability succeeds in revealing the true character of Célimène.

Oronte "a dilettante poet" is a man who has a high opinion of himself and his poetical genius. Open only to favorable criticism he courts the endorsements of society for his own high opinion of himself, and the approval of his friends for his poetic talent. Admiration and

praise he desires, frankness and sincerity he despises.

Acaste and Clitandre are described by Chatfield-Taylor as "two court dandies of emasculated wit." They are an embellishment of their own circles of society and constitute in the play the failing supports of the frivolous character of Célimène, and successful tools in the hand of the mischief-making prude Arsinoé.

In this brief outline we have a simple sketch of the chief characters, their relation one to another, and their place and comparative prominence in the play.

### 3. "Le Misanthrope," Alceste.

M. Taine in his "History of English Literature" speaks of the author of the play being "a philosopher, who brings us into contact with a universal truth by a particular example. We understand through him, as through La Bruyère or Nicole, the force of prejudice, the obstinacy of conventionality, the blindness of love." Keeping these three points in mind we shall more readily understand the philosophy of the author, Molière, and comprehend the purpose which he evidently had wanted to accomplish.

Two questions come up which must necessarily be answered.

Who was the "Misanthrope" and how did he come to be such ?

"The very word "misanthrope" conjures to the mind a dismal picture of outraged sentiment and embittered confidence." In these words of Chatfield-Taylor we have at once a clever definition of a misanthrope as well as a striking description of the cause which produces him. Who else but a man who had experienced some of these things is able to depict such character! It is the language of a

soul in misery, agonizing for the recognition of his sincerity in dealing with men generally, and a woman beloved in particular. To the misery of his own soul he gives expression in such words as shall not easily be forgotten. The "Misanthrope" can be the portrayal of but one man - Molière. Not that he names himself, but who can hesitate to recognize the fact that here we meet with the man who is wounded in soul, and betrayed by the heartlessness of the one passionately loved? Who else but Molière could have set forth the falsehood found in man, the inconsistencies of close relationship with which the world is teeming?

What is the cause of the production of such a character? If we accept the theory stated above, we must expect the answer to come from circumstances and conditions prevalent at a certain time in the author's life.

Now it has been said that at the time when Molière wrote the "Misanthrope" he endured the pangs of jealousy; his wife had shamefully betrayed him, but he could not resist loving her. Next we must recognize the physical conditions of the author,

which will help us to understand the bitterness of his feelings to some extent. For it is more than probable that the greater part of the play was written during a season of sickness and convalescence. His jealousy must have increased when, under such conditions, he was left alone in the sickroom, and while his youthful wife was moving about amidst a retinue of young and elegant noblemen, paying their homage to the most favorite actress of the day, the bitterness of feelings must have increased a hundredfold. Add to this the envy harbored and manifested against him by some of his contemporaries, and his disappointed confidence in friends, you will have the cause, the logical result of which must be "the most fatal of passions, the hatred of mankind."

We find in this masterpiece of Molière "a marvelous character analysis, and a profound philosophy of life." Since space has been given to the analysis of the principal characters in the play in another part of this thesis, we can now proceed to study the 'philosophy of life' of the author.

His hero is Alceste, whose loss of faith in mankind generally is the result of loss of faith in the woman he loves and adores. He is a well-born, honorable, and wealthy man, who rails against society, with which he is angry, through an innate and exaggerated sentiment of honor. In principle and theory he is nearly always right, while in practice and form he nearly always is wrong. In the most trifling, as well as in the gravest matters, he is severely strict. "He is sincere and earnest, but blunt and passionate; and it is through this very passion that he is betrayed into an exaggeration, and a quarrelsomeness which render him ridiculous and amusing." Alceste is also grumpy and awkward. His "valiant virtues are the outbreaks of a temper out of harmony with circumstances." He is an ardent, passionate, and persistent lover; a great-hearted, generous soul and loves domestic virtues. Had Célimène been anything but a coquette, the misanthrope would never have been created. A woman's insincerity causes a man to rail against the insincerity of the world. "His misanthropy is but the gall of

a noble nature betrayed by a woman's heartlessness into magnifying its own woes until they become those of humanity." This character analysis of the hero serves as a basis upon which the author's philosophy of human nature can be established.

How did he look upon men and manners of his time ? Manners being created by men show man's nature and manifest his character. Molière's view of his time and opinion of the men of his time finds ready utterance in the words of Alceste. To emphasize these the author has given him in Philinte a chosen friend whose principles were directly the reverse of his own. And what possibly could not all be brought out by the contrast in character of these two men is realized by the unworthy object upon which Alceste has bestowed his passionate love, in as much as flattery, falsehood, and malicious scandal always characterize the conversation of Célimène.

Alceste is " a blunt despiser of untruth seeking to rectify the vices of the world by the force of his own word and example," and thus rails against flattery, falsehood, coquetry, slander, injustice, selfishness, prudishness, hypocrisy. All

these create within him a hatred for society. He is not possessed of that worldly wisdom that characterizes his friend Philinte. He refuses to accept the "laissez faire" tenets of Philinte. The fact that "men have sufficient imprudence, and are wicked, villainous, and perverse enough to do him injustice in the face of the whole world" decides him not to forgive mankind for its failures to accept his honest views. The esteem one for another is based on some true preference, and therefore the friend of everybody can not be his man. Conventional friendship that "in smooth manner vies to treat the true worth and any fop with an equal grace" is abomination to him. Rather than submit to such insincere methods he prefers to become "a laughing stock." His aversion for insincerity he expresses in the words "all men are so odious to me that I should be sorry to appear rational in their eyes." Friendship can mean to him only the relation of two or more persons who are virtuous enough to adhere to certain principles which prohibit the possibility of becoming everybody's friend. The application of these principles is the only way



to reject the worldly doctrine that "when a man embraces you warmly, you must repay him in his own coin." In utter contrast to this, the author paints in Philinte the intelligent and amiable man who is characterized by his illusory justification of the way of the world and his phlegmatic resignation.

Sincerity must be maintained and practised under all circumstances. Even if a man expects you to say things that may please him, you must, if he challenge your true conviction, speak the whole truth. Oronte's sonnet falls victim to Alceste's sincere method of criticism. It follows bad models, the phrasing is not at all natural, and the figurative style is beside all good taste and form. "Versification is not rich, the whole thing is a mere trick of words, a sheer affectation." Such plain speech necessarily offends; but why not be sincere, if asked to be, though it may bring but sneers in return ?

Must we take a man as he wishes to be taken, or take him as he is ? In judging a man's work, shall we anticipate his own estimate of the same, or give our own honest conviction ?

Flattery, coquetry, and slander Alceste despises. Nobody feels inclined to laugh whenever Alceste attacks slander, because we can not ridicule his honesty and sincerity. The excesses, however, of the qualities make a man become ridiculous with impunity; honesty ought not to exceed the ordinary limits of moderation.

Why should Alceste have been enamoured of a coquette ? Célimène has nothing very amiable in her character and merely entertains by her scandal. One might say that "there is not one good point in her whole composition."

Courted by admirers she revels in vain flatteries, and cleverly reduces them to mere objects of scandalous gossips. Hypocrisy has seldom found so true portrayal as here, but it has always existed. Under the pangs of jealousy, with the conviction that Célimène proved false, how could Alceste be so ardent a lover ? His love certainly was not a fleeting sensual impulse, it was rather "a serious feeling arising from a want of a sincere mental union." And still he is attracted by her, blind to her

faults. Despite the falseness and hypocrisy in C  lim  ne he still continues to love, though he realizes his inability to please her. His jealousy causes him to ask in plaintive supplication

"And I, accused of too great jealousy,

What more have I than all the rest, I pray?"

It is a desperate struggle between reason and passionate love that is depicted in the hero's words

"Must I love you so ?

Oh, if I might retake my heart

From your fair hand;

For that rare boon I'd bless the skies.

To drive this terrible devotion

From out my soul,

I do my best, I grant;

Yet all my greatest efforts are in vain,

Indeed, 'tis for my sins

I love you thus."

The author has succeeded to create a lover whom all the world must love. Love in Alceste can only be of such a kind. His pure "passion commands respect." The pity of it, that a life should be doomed to be lost to mankind while coquetry per-

sonified in the fribbling Célimène celebrates its triumph in merciless fashion.

And yet in this very person it is possible for the author to depict fashionable life of his time. The very product of it becomes its critic. Cleverly, but shrewdly Célimène opens up the fray against some of her acquaintances, ridiculing Gérald to be nothing but a "dull mumbler," describing Cléon as a rich upstart whose merit socially

"Is his cook, his board alone

The object of the visits that we pay."

Célimène's unkind criticism and scathing wit is heartily endorsed by Clitandre and Acaste, both of which Alceste considers simply scandalmongers. It is thus that Molière depicts the influence of gossip and slander, the proneness of human nature to yield to them. Strange it may seem that while the slandering manner in which Célimène deals with some of her friends and admirers produces such dire results, she so deliciously describes Arsinoé the prude, a character that rouses our utter disgust. While herself blameworthy of many traits too promi-

nently exposed, Célimène deftly paints the picture of the prude.

"A humbug, double-faced!

Worldly of heart, . . .

With veil of counterfeited prudery,

She seeks to hide the solitude of home;

. . . . .

Forsooth a lover mightily would please

My lady;

Even now, methinks, she looks

Upon Alceste with heartfelt tenderness."

And then we know what follows - by a hair's breath she almost causes the awful tragedy of blasting the hope of two lovers. Like a soothing ointment upon a malignant wound it must act to realize that the mischief-making prude Arsinoé does not succeed to estrange the lovers. Man's moral depravity is great, but that its ugliness should still be increased by fiendish intrigues even Molière can not allow to come to pass in this case. The love-test can not be simply based upon the slanders, black-mailing, and gossips, but is possible only by letting the heart of either lover speak its

own conviction and sentiment.

The love between Alceste and Célimène can never realize its culmination. He is earnest and sincere, an ardent lover, but forsakes her after "every proof of her attachment and constancy, for no other reason than that she will not submit to the technical formality of going to live with him in a wilderness."

## CONCLUSION.

## C O N C L U S I O N .

After this critical analysis, a few brief sentences may suffice to state the writer's conclusion.

Molière, as a rule, drew from life the material he worked into his plays. His 'Misanthrope' is a type of all times. In it Molière reveals more of his real self and of his inner life than in any other of his splendid productions. His complaints of the corruption of the social constitution are justified, nobody would dispute the facts which he adduces.

The abuses of the system of society are shown. Backbiting coquettes are made contemptible. False prudes learn that their grievances are of no use whatsoever.

Virtue is still powerful, and "in spite of the ridicule caused by Alceste's austerity, eclipses all that surrounds it."

The Court does not escape the attacks of the author; "its hollowness, its glitter and empty heads are not spared." When looking upon the splendor of Versailles, men and women enjoying themselves, the



author asks how is it all obtained ? the answer comes "By lies and hypocrisies."

The courtiers were inconceivably petty in their outlook, frivolous in their interests, very often harsh and heartless. Men and women who are frequenters of the court are seen in this play committing acts of unpardonable rudeness. Even ordinary politeness seems on the wane when we listen to the quarrel of Célimène and Arsinoé. The indelicacy of which Alceste is guilty, making use of Célimène's letters, given to him by a jealous woman, is indefensible. No harm seems to have been evident in the betrayal of ordinary propriety. Brander Matthews depicts the period of Louis XIV "as an age of grossness and brutality not so far removed from the despicable cruelty of the Fronde."

Alceste, protesting against the customs of his time, also pours forth his indignation against the flagrant corruptibility of the judges.

In all these different protests made by Alceste, Molière succeeds to reveal the nature of the human heart.

If Molière "did not perceive the vices of

his own plays warrants us to say that he knew men by close observation and scrutinizing study.

Alceste may be a misanthrope, but he is neither a pessimist, nor a cynic. We may call him a preacher of sincerity who abhors everything that is false. He has manliness, magnanimity of soul, and is free from all pettiness. He emphasizes sincerity in little things as well as in the greater ones. We need not wonder that 'his heart grew hot within him,' when we consider that he himself had suffered insult and injury from those born to superior station.

"Le Misanthrope" reveals a great deal of the inner life and thought of its author, and "we need not doubt that Molière designed Alceste rather as a warning than as an example, even if he also used the character as the mouthpiece for certain of his own convictions."

Molière was a thinker who felt acutely, his emotion and intellectual endeavor have resulted in a comedy that seems almost tragic. He has made it possible that comedy might contain the deeper views of life. Comedy to him became

the vehicle through which full expression of maturer thoughts may be given.

Molière meant Alceste to evoke laughter, but also intended him to provoke thought.

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